

Noah takes heart

by James Beddington

On Wednesday and Thursday of last week, Gwen Noah performed five recent choreographies of more than twenty-five works in her repertoire. The five works, collectively titled *Take Heart*, were performed at The Church at 5657 North Street. The house on Wednesday was packed on a night that was expected to be the slow evening of the two. The five pieces that make up *Take Heart* are, in order, *Brutal Motion*, *John Wayne Is Dead*, *Take heart*, *Passion Undercover* and *Trust*.

Dance Review

Gwen Noah

The Church, November 23 & 24

The evening was masterfully put together, with Gwen Noah transforming the space into an evocative chamber that secreted both presence and magic. The music was specifically written and performed by a variety of composers and musicians for the dances.

The appropriately named *Brutal Motion* began the performance, and this piece was choreographed by Ottawa-based Julie West in collaboration with Ms. Noah. The music by Tim Brady conveyed a sense of disarrayed emotions. Noah's violent, jagged movements were excruciating, the few momentary pauses bringing ragged breaths from the audience and Gwen alike.

John Wayne is Dead is a tribute to a well-known but little understood media icon. His reality often differs from the perception of him through his typecasting. The sound-scape for the piece features Morricone's *The Mission* and the voice of Sean Noah, a fan of John Wayne. As a dance it was energetic and dynamic. *Take Heart*, the title piece for this show, was unfortunately marred by the splitting of the bagpipes intended for the accompaniment; Mr. MacInnis performed the music on the practice instrument, a quieter substitute.

The dance was captivating but I am unsure of what I feel about it. Actually, I feel uncomfortable writing about dance on a whole because I can't dance myself.

Passion Undercover is one of two pieces in this production with music by Gordon Laurin, also responsible for the posters. The piece, as the name suggests, is focused on the passionate and sensual aspects of dance.

Trust is a case of saving the best for last. It was my favourite piece of the evening. Noah's style of performance changed dramatically in *Trust*. Very direct in the earlier portion of the evening Noah suddenly became the observed. One felt as if you had entered the temple illicitly and you were a voyeur watching a private ritual. The costume by Susan Rome evoked simultaneous images of classical Rome, Greece and Egypt. There were elements of ritual in the dance that were evocative, religious, and mysterious beyond my ability to express. The music for *Trust* is a composition of Gordon Laurin.

If you happen to be able to attend the performance of *Take Heart*, on the December 2 at 8 p.m. in The University College of Cape Breton Broadmore Playhouse, I urge you to attend. It will be worth your drive to Cape Breton.

Interview

Gwen Noah is a woman who is living her art.

"It is a pioneer road that I'm on," she says. In a previous interview she said you have to do anything and not feel guilty to survive, as she laughed at security.

"We live and we die."

She is a local dancer, choreographer and teacher. She takes an active interest in every element of her presentation to the public, both inside and outside of performance. When I asked her about the elements involved in a performance she listed the dance, costume, lighting, music and the space. As artistic director of Gwen Noah Dance she oversees her publicity, and we brought up the use of voice in our discussion. Gwen started her career as a dancer early in her native Newfoundland, touring the province twice at age fourteen. By the age of seventeen she had completed "basic training." She then went to live and study in Lon-

don, England with the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing after which she was no longer "hooked into ballet."

Noah has danced in a variety of venues, both traditional and unconventional, indoors and outside. Speaking about theatres, Noah said, "Every theatre has a different energy and a different size stage and a different distance from the stage to the audience. Is it raked? How are the sight lines?" There are infinitely more variables in other sites. Noah mentions an occasion where there were "a lot of people walking around munching on hot dogs and saying rude things to you... while you were performing."

Noah observes that there is a need for more dance in Halifax.

"People need to go out and see dance... It is completely different seeing someone perform live than it is to sit in front of the TV or even go to a movie." There is great variety in dance, something for everyone who is willing to look. When people hear about dance they, "come to ballet first" — whether it is an article in the paper or a thirty second spot on the TV news, our culture lives in the past; it is a culture of the old forms and the old works that shove the new aside.

Contemporary dance has blossomed in Canada, Montreal being the center, Toronto and Vancouver being strong with a little bit of work happening in Alberta, "and that's about it." Gwen Noah has worked with support from the government and is grateful for the support that she has received. However, she needs more and the government can't come up with all of the money, which means that as an artist and entrepreneur you have to try to make your art viable.

Talking about art in general, "If you don't support it, it's going to go... go out to the galleries go out to the shows." Most are inexpensive or even free and attendance makes all the difference. With the recent media focus on anorexia in female athletes, a disease that was known as a dancer's disease, one of the biggest problems for dancers is the continual



Gwen Noah in performance

PHOTO: JAMES BEDDINGTON

battle of body and image.

Gwen confessed that she has been a victim of image in the past but says,

"I'm too tired to do that now and I need to eat so I usually do."

Sensitive Mr. Smith

by James Covey

It was standing room only at the Café Mokka last Saturday for Russell Smith's reading from his debut novel *How Inensitive*. The novel, clearly autobiographical, is about a Maritimer who moves to Toronto to pursue a writing career.

Book Reading/Review
Russell Smith
How Inensitive

Smith, who grew up in Halifax, has been freelancing in Toronto for five years now. His novel represents a surprisingly accomplished literary debut, and for those who have been looking for something smart and contemporary but are left cold by the shallow twentysomething novels of Douglas Coupland and others, it is a godsend.

Actually, Russell Smith is thirty-one years old, but you'd never guess it from his very youthful appearance.

The Mokka audience was completely won over by his reading, which included a very convincing and funny Vancouver accent for one of the characters. He read from chapters one and fourteen of the novel, which are two of the most caustically humorous sections of the book. In



these sections, protagonist Ted Owen (initials T.O., but Smith assures me that this is a coincidence) meets an airhead Vancouverite and a slick Torontonian while on the train from Montreal to Toronto, and finds himself as a guest panelist on a tabloid TV talk show from hell (the "Jenny

Bolo Show").

The character of Ted Owen is a disillusioned graduate of the Concordia cultural studies program, who finds that his master's degree in poststructuralist theory has done little to prepare him for the shallow subculture he finds himself sucked into in downtown Toronto. Smith uses the misadventures of his character to satirize just about every aspect of the government-grant-driven, club-hopping cultural scene. But the novel is not all comic satire, and at various points *How Inensitive* gets downright... sensitive. The story in this novel is as engaging as the satire. I couldn't put this book down; in fact, I read all 258 pages in two sittings.

Smith said during the question period following the reading that the book took two years to write, one year to find a publisher, and another year to revise and publish. He already has a second novel well under way and I'm looking forward to it.



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